

Message Text

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SUBJ: WORLD POPULATION CONFERENCE

REF: A) STATE 161933 B) NEW DELHI 10275 C) NEW DELHI 7230

1. EMBOFF MET WITH ADDITIONAL SECRETARY A. CHANDRASEKHAR, MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY PLANNING, TO DISCUSS THE GOI POSITION AT THE WORLD POPULATION CONFERENCE (REF A). CHANDRASEKHAR, A MEMBER OF THE GOI DELEGATION TO BUCHAREST, REITERATED INDIAN SUPPORT FOR THE UN WORLD PLAN OF ACTION AS BEING A BALANCED DOCUMENT ACCEPTABLE TO ALL NATIONS. THE UN PLAN'S EMPHASIS ON OVERALL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE REDUCTION OF POVERTY AGREES WITH THE NEW GOI STRATEGY (REF C), OF INTEGRATING HEALTH, FAMILY PLANNING AND MATERNITY SERVICES FOR THE RURAL POPULATION. CHANDRASEKHAS STRESSED THE OVERRIDING NEED TO SATISFY MINIMUM NEEDS, AND THE FUTILITY OF CONCENTRATING ON FAMILY PLANNING IN ISOLATION.

2. CHANDRASEKHAR SEES THE CONFERENCE PRIMARILY AS A FORUM FOR INCREASING AWARENESS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN POPULATION CONTROL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. HE CRITICIZED US ATTEMPTS TO FOCUS THE CONFERENCE MORE NARROWLY ON FAMILY PLANNING, SINCE MANY LATIM AMERICAN STATES CONSIDER THEMSELVES UNDERPOPULATED AND WOULD

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NOT ACCEPT THE NEED FOR REDUCING THEIR POPULATION GROWTH. HE

BELIEVED US TARGETS FOR REDUCING BIRTHRATES AND REACHING REPLACEMENT LEVELS WERE FINE IDEALS, BUT WERE UNREALISTIC FOR COUNTRIES WITH A HUGE POPULATION BASE SUCH AS INDIA. A STRICT INTERPRETATION OF POPULATION TARGETS WOULD CASE AN UNNECESSARILY BAD LIGHT ON COUNTRIES WHICH COULD NOT MEET THESE GOALS. THE GOI DOES NOT SEE FAMILY PLANNING AS A MAGIC PANACEA FOR INDIA'S ILLS, BUT AS ONE OF MANY INSTRUMENTS TO BE USED AGAINST POVERTY, AND WE EXPECT THE INDIAN DELEGATION AT BUCHAREST TO RESIST ATTEMPTS BY THE US OR OTHER DELEGATIONS TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON LDC FAMILY PLANNING PROGRAMS.

3. COMMENTING ON OUTSIDE CRITICISM OF INDIAN FAMILY PLANNING BUDGETARY CUTBACKS, CHANDRASEKHAR NOTED THAT THE EARLIER GOI PROGRAM WAS ORIENTED TOO MUCH TOWARD THE URBAN MIDDLE CLASSES AND HAD ACHIEVED MOST OF ITS SUCCESSES AMONG THESE GROUPS. THE GOI HAD QUITE RIGHTLY ELIMINATED FUNDING OF MASS VASECTOMY CAMPS, SINCE THE CAMPS PROVIDED BRIBES RATHER THAN BRINGING A BASIC CHANGE IN MOTIVATION, AND WERE CAUSING RESISTANCE IN RURAL AREAS TO ANY KIND OF FAMILY PLANNING. THE OLD STRATEGY OF TRYING TO REDUCE BIRTHS BY A VARIETY OF TECHNIQUES WITHOUT CHANGING THE UNDERLYING REASONS FOR LARGE FAMILIES, WAS FUTILE, AND CONTINUING EXPENDITURES ALONG THESE LINES WOULD BE ILL-ADVISED.

4. CHANDRASEKHAR SUMMED UP INDIAN APPROACHES TO FAMILY PLANNING BY SAYING THAT URBANIZATION AND ECONOMIC GROWTH WOULD INEVITABLY PROVIDE THE SOCIAL CHANGE NECESSARY FOR REDUCING THE BIRTH RATE. THE ROLE OF THE GOI FAMILY PLANNING DEPARTMENT WOULD BE TO PROVIDE FACILITIES FOR THOSE WHO HAD ALREADY DECIDED TO LIMIT THEIR FAMILIES. UP TO NOW, THIS MOTIVATION HAS LARGELY BEEN CONFINED TO THE CITIES, AND FAMILY PLANNING WILL NOT BE SUCCESSFUL UNTIL IT IS TRANSFORMED FROM A GOI PROGRAM INTO AN GENUINE MASS MOVEMENT IN THE RURAL AREAS. RESPONDING TO A QUESTION BY EMBOFF, CHANDRASEKHAR COMMENTED FAVORABLY ON THE THESIS OF THE MYTH OF POPULATION CONTROL BY MAHMUD MAMDANI, NAMELY THAT RURAL FAMILIES HAD MANY CHILDREN BECUASE IT WAS ECONOMICALLY ADVANTAGEOUS FOR THEM TO DO SO, AND THAT THE HIGH INDIAN BIRTH RATE IS MORE OF A RESULT THAN AN UNDERLYING CAUSE OF POVERTY.

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